homework 6

Semantics 3, UCLA Linguistics

due May 9, 2022

We've analyzed measure phrases (MPs) as effectively proper names of degrees, type d. If this is right, we would expect them to serve as arguments to gradable adjectives. Below are three reasons to abandon this idea.

1. cross-linguistically, when a language syntactically differentiates between arguments and modifiers, MPs pattern with the latter.

    (1) a. A [$_{VP}$ smooched B]   (internal) argument to the right
         b. A is [$_{AdjP}$ 5ft tall]   MP to the left

    (2) a. A [$_{VP}$ a embarassé (*de) B] 'A kissed B.'
         b. A est [$_{AdjP}$ haut *(de) 1,27m].
             'A is 1.27m high'

2. while only a strict subset of gradable adjectives (the 'measure adjectives') can cooccur with MPs (and which ones varies cross-linguistically more than you'd think!), none of them are negative antonyms

    (3) a. A is 6ft tall.
         b. *B is 4ft short.

3. MPs can function as comparative differentials, too, i.e. modify the gap between two arguments in a comparison

    (4) a. A is 2ft taller than B.
         b. This is 20° hotter than that.

Use those data points to answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

A. If MPs don't denote something of type d, then, what type should we give them? Answer this question by providing a step-by-step compositional derivation of the truth conditions of *A is 6ft tall*.

B. Explain the problem posted by the negative-antonym data in (3) above for the analysis in which MPs denote degrees (type d).

C. Try to come up with an explanation for the contrast in (3) in your new approach (in (A)). It might help to think about the nature of the degree scales associated with each scale.

D. **Bonus exercise:** Provide a minimal pair like those above, in a non-English non-French language, to further test the claim that MPs behave like non-arguments.

Credit where credit is due:
Schwarzschild, Roger. 2005. [Title omitted for secrecy] *Recherches linguistiques de Vincennes* 35: 207–228.